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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0275
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 000644

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR-COLLINS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [CH](#) [TX](#) [ST](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: ST. LUCIAN CABINET COUP FAILED, BUT NEW PRIME
MINISTER STILL LIKELY

REF: A. BRIDGETOWN 589
[1](#)B. BRIDGETOWN 525

Classified By: DCM Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: St. Lucia's Prime Minister Sir John Compton reportedly returned from New York on May 19. His weakened state probably means that St. Lucia's unsettled political situation will continue. The government has made no official announcements since his return, but it is likely that Acting Prime Minister Stephenson King will continue in that position. Popular outcry against Foreign Minister Rufus Bousquet and Housing Minister Richard Fredrick for their alleged involvement in a cabinet coup against Compton neutralized their chances to lead the government at this time. Without Compton, the United Workers Party (UWP) government may be able to limp along, but probably will not survive in office the full five years left in its term. Regardless of who succeeds Compton, a reversal of the China-Taiwan decision is unlikely in the near term. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) According to press reports and one member of his cabinet, Prime Minister Sir John Compton returned to St. Lucia on May 19, following a three-week hospital stay in New York. While in New York for a routine medical check-up, Compton suffered a series of strokes (ref B). Since his return, St. Lucia's government has not yet made an official announcement concerning his health, possible retirement, or a successor. However, members of the St. Lucian government publicly stated that it was unlikely that Compton would return to his official duties.

EVEN IN SICKNESS, COMPTON PREVAILS

[1](#)3. (C) When Compton and FM Bousquet both left for the United States on May 1, Bousquet appeared well-positioned to push Compton out of office and politics. Bousquet had just succeeded in lining up the majority of the cabinet against Compton and in support of the decision to reestablish diplomatic relation with Taiwan (ref B). Compton was outmaneuvered, but Bousquet overplayed his hand. Compton's illness and rumors of the Bousquet-led cabinet coup generated an upsurge of public sympathy for Compton, the aging "Father of St. Lucia." That upsurge was apparently helped along by Minister for Economic Affairs Ausbert d'Auvergne, a Compton-loyalist who told a UK diplomat that he has been working to generate negative press against Bousquet. As a

result, Bousquet is being blamed for Compton's strokes and has become the most hated man in St. Lucia. His chances of succeeding Compton are therefore essentially nil. The public has also found Housing Minister Richard Fredrick guilty by association for supporting Bousquet in his grab for power. As such, Fredrick's ambitions too have been temporarily neutralized. Both ministers kept a low profile the week prior to Compton's May 19 return.

FRUSTRATION OF THE PEOPLE

¶4. (U) In addition to the public's disapproval of Bousquet and Fredrick, St. Lucians have also been frustrated with the government's mishandling of the situation. Acting Prime Minister Stephenson King issued a number of statements, which in hindsight, proved to be false. What is now being viewed by St. Lucians as a lack of honesty severely damaged King's public credibility.

A KING OR A SPIDER: WHO WILL LEAD?

¶5. (C) With both Bousquet and Fredrick sidelined, the most likely candidates to succeed Compton are King and Deputy Political Leader and Minister for Social Transformation, Lenard "Spider" Montoute. Given King's mishandling of information, Montoute seems to be the more popular candidate among St. Lucians. However, King is the more experienced political leader, having served as a member of parliament and Minister for Health in the previous UWP government from 1987 to 1997. He was also considered the backbone of the UWP during its ten years in opposition (1997-2006). King may also be the more likely compromise candidate because he is a

non-controversial politician who rarely offends. Some in the UWP may also consider King's indecisiveness and a lack of leadership skills as a plus because these qualities would ensure that King would be only a transitional figure, a placeholder while the UWP reorganizes itself. Montoute may get his chance later. He shows more charisma and enthusiasm than King, but the December 2006 election was only his second bid for a parliamentary seat and the first he successfully contested.

THE FUTURE OF CHINA-TAIWAN

¶6. (C) Although both King and Montoute reportedly supported Compton in his plan to keep diplomatic relations with China, the government will not revisit the issue regardless of who takes power. Montoute, who personally sees relations with China over Taiwan as advantageous, told PolOff that the cabinet made its decision to recognize Taiwan and a reversal at this point would only cause more damage to St. Lucia's credibility.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Compton's likely retirement will have a lasting impact on St. Lucian politics. When Compton retired in 1996, the UWP imploded under a lack of leadership and suffered from internal power struggles until Compton came out of retirement in 2006 and led his party to victory. Now that he may no longer be able to lead his party, the UWP again appears torn by internal disagreements and personal rivalries. Compton, who liked to concentrate all power in his hands, is largely responsible for this situation. While he built the UWP and led it to victory a number of times, he failed to plan for its future by grooming a successor.

¶8. (C) Regardless of who succeeds Compton, few expect the new prime minister to last more than a year or two in light of the power struggles within the UWP. The opposition St. Lucia Labor Party (SLP) will seek to capitalize on the UWP's disarray. The SLP is organized, disciplined, and savvy at spinning the press. Without a strong leader at the UWP helm,

the SLP may succeed at forcing early parliamentary elections.

19. (C) Compton's retirement may also impact U.S. relations with St. Lucia. Compton naturally gravitated to the United States, and never lost sight of our shared goals in the region. He viewed with suspicion the encroachment of the region's new "benefactors," Venezuela, Cuba, and China. For example, among his first announcements upon returning to office in December 2006, was to reject Venezuela's PetroCaribe program. His possible UWP successors may be too weak not to make certain compromises.

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